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TAGS: [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [OIIP](#) [OPRC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: MAY 06, 2009

Summary: U.S. Special Envoy Holbrooke's statement quashing all speculations of a "military takeover" in Pakistan saying that "it would be terrible if it happened and Washington would oppose it strongly" dominated headlines in all newspapers on Wednesday. Newspapers highlighted report that "hundreds of people fled Mingora after the military urged residents to seek safety as fresh fighting with Taliban militants could erupt." President Zardari's assurance to the U.S. administration that "Pakistan's nuclear assets are not in any danger of falling in the hands of the insurgents" received prominent display. Some major dailies ran the White House statement reiterating that "there would be no 'blank checks' for Pakistan." Report of a "suicide attack near Peshawar killing at least seven people including two children" received front page coverage.

Most major dailies ran editorials on the new National Judicial Policy announced the other day. However, several editorial writers and columnists discussed the overall security situation of the country, and President Zardari's visit to the United States. Commenting on the Kerry-Lugar bill, the prestigious daily, "Dawn," observed that "if the U.S. aid is delivered quickly and spent effectively, meaningful change on the ground can be achieved." The second-largest Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" opined that the "constant propaganda by President Obama, Secretary Clinton, Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen that India is not a threat to Pakistan could be part of a big international conspiracy." The Peshawar-based Urdu daily, "Mashriq," noted that "it is a matter of satisfaction that the government has finally decided to launch a full-fledged military operation in Swat to flush out Taliban from the valley." End Summary.

News Stories

"U.S. Not To Support Military Coup, Says Holbrooke" "Dawn" (05/06)

"The United States on Tuesday quashed all speculations of a military take-over in Pakistan, saying that it would be terrible if it happened and Washington would oppose it strongly. U.S. special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke touched on a number of sensitive issues in his testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He opposed linking U.S. aid to allowing access to Dr. A.Q. Khan and indicated that the U.S. might be working on a program with Pakistan to block FM Radio broadcasts by pro-Taliban clerics."

"Pakistan Not A Failed State" "The News" (05/06)

"Stressing that the United States has the 'highest strategic interests' in supporting the democratic government of Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke voiced President Barack Obama's strong backing for the civilian government led by President Asif Ali Zardari. Testifying before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Holbrooke told lawmakers that we should not confuse this (support) with prediction of collapse (of the Pakistani state). 'Pakistan is not a failed state,' he said, adding Pakistan is facing challenges but is not in a situation where it could collapse."

"Exodus From Swat As Operation Looms" "Dawn" (05/06)

"Hundreds of people fled Swat's main town of Mingora on Tuesday after the military urged residents to seek safety as fresh fighting with Taliban militants could erupt."

"Nuclear Assets Safe, Zardari Assures U.S." "Dawn" (05/06)

"President Asif Ali Zardari has assured the Obama administration that his government is determined to root out insurgency in the frontier region and that country's nuclear assets are not in any danger of falling in the hands of the insurgents. The assurance was conveyed in a preliminary meeting with U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke on Monday night before the Wednesday summit at the White House."

"Haqqani Tells U.S. Not To Spread Pakistan Nuclear Scare" "The News" (05/06)

"Pakistan on Tuesday ruled out the possibility of its nuclear assets falling into the wrong hands, with its top diplomat in Washington asking American experts to desist from scaring people with highly unlikely hypothetical scenarios, Ambassador Husain Haqqani told CNN."

"Security Of Pakistan's Nukes Still Cause Of Concern" "Dawn" (05/06)

"The security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is still cause of concern for Washington despite reassurances that the weapons are out of reach of Taliban militants, the U.S. National Security Advisor General James Jones said in an interview with the BBC."

"No Blank Checks For Pakistan: White House" "Dawn" (05/06)

"The White House vowed Tuesday there would be no 'blank checks' for Pakistan after two top U.S. senators unveiled plans to expand and overhaul civilian aid to the key U.S. ally. 'The President has said on numerous occasions there shouldn't be and there won't be blank checks.' 'The President supports the building in of accountability measures to ensure that we are making progress and if progress isn't made then we'll readjust our strategy,' White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said."

"Kerry-Lugar Bill A Positive Beginning: FO" "The News" (05/06)

"Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir and senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed a guarded optimism over the Kerry-Lugar bill, which triples the United States' civilian aid to Pakistan to \$1.5 billion per annum for the next five years, saying that they were looking at it 'positively,' the Foreign Office spokesman told 'The News.'"

"U.S. Body Agrees To Lift Pro-India Condition On Pak Aid" "The News" (05/06)

"Pakistan has ultimately prevailed upon the U.S. House International Committee on Foreign Relations to relax its India-specific conditions proposed in the bill for the provision of \$1.5 billion annually for five years. An understanding in this regard reached in Washington on Tuesday at the Capitol Hill during the meeting of the committee with Visiting President Asif Ali Zardari who had a lengthy discussion with the committee members."

"Obama Ally Doubts U.S. Aid Will Make An Impact" "The News" (05/06)

"A top U.S. lawmaker said on Tuesday that Pakistan must 'show seriousness of purpose' against extremists and Afghanistan must do

more against corruption ahead of tough three-way talks in Washington. 'I think there's a continuing concern as to whether or not we can be successful in these two countries,' Democratic House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer told reporters in Washington."

"U.S. Officials Discuss Peace, Security Issues With Malik" "The News" (05/06)

"Issues relating to peace and development in South Asia were discussed in Washington on Tuesday between senior American officials and Interior Minister Rehman Malik. Those meeting the Minister included U.S. Special Representative on Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke, Eric J. Roswell, Assistant Secretary Bureau of Diplomatic Security, State Department and David Johson, Assistant Secretary Bureau of Intelligence, Narcotics and Law Enforcement."

"Suicide Bomber Kills 7 Near Peshawar" "Dawn" (05/06)

"Seven people, two children and a Frontier Corps soldier among them, were killed and 48 others injured when an explosives-laden car rammed into a pick-up near a check-post on the Bara road on Tuesday morning, eyewitnesses told 'Dawn.'"

"Militants Take Over Executive Offices In Swat; 18 Killed In Fierce Fighting As Thousands Flee; Muslim Khan Claims 90 Per Cent Control Over Valley" "The News" (05/06)

"Militants on Tuesday attacked the DIG office, Commissioner Office, police station and museum in Saidu Sharif and finally captured the DIG office as the fighting between security forces and militants raged in the Swat valley, which left 18 dead and 20 others injured.... While talking to reporters, Taliban spokesman Muslim Khan claimed militants were in control of '90 per cent' of the valley and said their actions were in response to 'Army violations of the peace deal.'"

"Swat To Be Evacuated Ahead Of Operation" "The News" (05/06)

"A military operation is in the offing in Swat where the whole population in targeted areas would be evacuated and shifted to camps before decisive storming by the Army. However, despite the military operation, the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation, 2009 would remain enforced, a key Frontier government source said."

"Sufi, Fazlullah Have No Control Over Taliban" "The News" (05/06)

"Taliban are becoming a greater threat in Swat and other troubled areas, as they have regrouped after implementation of Nizam-e-Adl Regulation, an official report says. The report, which was submitted to the government by the security agencies, revealed that Tehrik Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi Chief Sufi Mohammad and Maulana Fazlullah have no control over Taliban."

"2,260 Displaced Families Reach Swabi" "The News" (05/06)

"The officials of the district administration said on Tuesday that 2,260 displaced families had so far arrived in Swabi from Buner district and got them registered with the administration."

"TTP Warns NWFP Doctors Over Dress" "The News" (05/06)

"The banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has allegedly warned doctors of the public sector hospitals in Peshawar to stop wearing shirts and trousers or face suicide bombing, a senior doctor of the Lady Reading Hospital (LRH) - told 'The News' on condition of anonymity."

"19 Killed In Mohmand Clashes; Six Troops Missing" "Dawn" (05/06)

"Fifteen militants, two security personnel and two civilians were killed in clashes between troops and Taliban in Mohmand tribal region on Tuesday."

"Tortured, Stripped, And Video Taped - This Is Dr. Aafia's Story!" "The News" (05/06)

"Inside a New York jail, six masked men tied her hands behind her back, stripped her naked, and made a video recording of her

humiliation. While being taken back to her cell in a wheelchair, a woman covered her with a blanket and begged the masked men not to humiliate Dr. Aafia Siddiqui. 'In response to a question about the nature of security checks, Dr. Aafia said many a times she was stripped in the name of a 'security check' in the New York Jail and due to that humiliation she even stopped seeing her lawyer. She despised being stripped for security checks.'"

Editorials/Op-eds

"A Fresh Start," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (05/06)

"As the country potentially moves closer to a necessary but messy fight against the militants, it is clear that focusing on one geographical area or the military option alone will not be enough to defeat a rising militancy. A large part of any successful long-term strategy against militancy will involve improving the state's ability to govern and deliver basic public services to its people.... So if the U.S. aid is delivered quickly and spent effectively, meaningful change on the ground can be achieved."

"Indian Military Exercises And Destructive Ambitions," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 150,000) (05/06)

"It is unfortunate that the U.S. is exaggerating the threat from Talibanization and even Pakistani officials nod when such things are said but no one is raising their voice against India's water aggressi. The Indian military exercises and water terrorism have also exposed U.S. assurances that Pakistan faces no threat from India. The constant propaganda by Obama, Hillary Clinton, Robert Gates and Mike Mullen that India is not a threat to Pakistan could be part of a big international conspiracy also."

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"Government Left With No Option Except Military Operation," an editorial in the Peshawar-based Urdu-language daily "Mashriq" (cir. 55,000) (05/06)

"It is a matter of satisfaction that the government has finally decided to launch a full-fledged military operation in Swat to flush out Taliban from the valley. However it is equally important to urge the residents of Swat valley to vacate the area to avoid any civilian casualties during the operation. Moreover, the government should take immediate steps to accommodate the IDPs and provide them with basic amenities of life in those makeshift camps."

"Tripled Expectations," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/06)

"The Kerry-Lugar bill, under which U.S. military and non-military aid to Pakistan would triple to \$1.5 billion a year, has been tabled in the U.S. Senate ... stressing that Pakistan must tackle militancy and ensure no help is offered to terrorist groups from its soil.... The fact is that we can gain access to more assistance from the world only if we can persuade it of our will to go after terrorists.... Assistance is not offered because there is a lack of confidence in capability and commitment. This impression must then be changed so that Pakistan can benefit from the new legislation and other bills like it - now and also in the future."

"How Long U.S. Would Continue To Fool Us?" an editorial in the Karachi-based center-right sensationalist Urdu daily "Ummat" (cir. 33,000) (05/06)

"The Kerry-Lugar bill aims to establish long-term relation between Pakistan and the U.S. In fact, Senator Kerry and Senator Lugar are deceiving people of Pakistan by talking of building relations with us. How can they assume that people of Pakistan would have friendship with a country who continues to strike our land with drone predators? Pakistan should demonstrate courage to reject the so-called sympathies of America and tell them that Pakistanis hate them, and our ways are parted from now on. After all how long the U.S. would continue to befool us?"

"All-Out War," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/06)

"The military can wrest back final control of areas currently under the Taliban only if it is not impeded and held back as has happened in the past. People are desperate to be rescued from the militants. The military must live up to their expectations.... They must fight off the Taliban and demonstrate that Pakistan is a strong, viable state. But at the same time they must also protect people and, by doing so, build a bigger coalition that can shake off the evil hold of the Taliban."

"Who Is Responsible For The Worsening Situation In Swat And Adjoining Areas?," an editorial in liberal Urdu daily "Express" (cir. 25,000) (05/06)

"The real intentions of Swati Taliban are slowly becoming clear, and it seems that their supporters are also growing aware of the real situation.... Although the situation in the region is pretty bad, it has not yet reached a point of no-return. Hence it would not be wrong to say that the TNSM still has time to get on with the experiment of Nizam-i-Adl, but only in Swat and that too under government supervision. Otherwise a full-fledged operation in area would be inevitable."

"Kerry-Lugar Bill: Still Seeking Control Over Pakistan," an op-ed by Shireen M. Mazari in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/06)

"The U.S. leadership with its multiple histrionics, beginning with Obama, has made its negative Pakistan agenda clear: it is eventually seeking control of our nuclear assets and we are playing into their hands. On the one hand, the militants are threatening the fabric of Pakistani society and on the other hand the U.S. is creating violent dissensions within Pakistan not only amongst civil society but also between the military and civilian structures. It knows that unless it destroys the military institution, it cannot achieve its goal of targeting out nuclear assets. So, it is demanding a role for the military which will undermine its morale, bring it into conflict with its own people and create further unrest.... As for the US agenda, what part is still not clear to our rulers?"

"Pakistan's Critical Hour," an op-ed by Ahmed Rashid in the Lahore-based liberal English daily "The Post" (cir. 5,000) (05/06)

"The speed and conditions with which Congress provides emergency aid to Islamabad will affect the Pakistani government and army's ability and will to resist the Taliban onslaught. It will also affect America's image in Pakistan and the regions. Pakistanis are looking for evidence of the long-term U.S. commitment about which President Obama has spoken.... Congress should authorize these funds quickly, giving the Obama administration tools to convince the Pakistani people that it is standing behind them."

"Is Obama's Concern Justified?," an op-ed by Zubeida Mustafa in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (05/06)

"The possibility of Pakistan's failure in countering the insurgency gives rise to Washington's next concern. What if Pakistan's nuclear weapons fall into the hands of the militants? Taliban armed with nukes would pose a mortal danger to the world. This analysis cannot be disputed. The problem for us is that we do not know how the U.S. plans to address the issue of the 'fragility' and 'inability' of the government. The U.S. has pumped in massive sums into the country - the latest initiative envisages another \$7.5bn over five years. But it now realizes that foreign assistance by itself is not enough. It lines a few pockets - in Pakistan as well as in America - and does not always trickle down to the common man to win his loyalty for those at the helm. It is the government in Islamabad that must put the funds to sensible and honest use for the benefit of the common man. Thus alone can he be made to feel he has a stake in the system."

"Thank you, America," an op-ed by Ijaz Hussain in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (05/06)

"It is possible to put several interpretations on what Obama said."

One interpretation is that he has tried to provide justification to the US Congress for an easy passage of the Kerry-Lugar bill. After all, Obama's statement was not far from the truth because the Zardari government has undeniably failed to provide good governance. However, Obama can be faulted for using an inappropriate language and for publicly criticizing the civilian government. The second interpretation is based on the timing of the statement, made a few days before President Zardari's visit to Washington. In this view, Obama made the remarks in order to pressurize Zardari to make him fully toe the American line on terrorism."

"State Of Pakistan-U.S. Ties," an op-ed by Nasim Zehra in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/06)

"The U.S., like many Pakistanis, too wants the national political leadership to be in partnership while tackling national problems. However mid-term elections do not appear to be an option of first-choice for key power-brokers and power-players within and outside of Pakistan. Overall it appears that within the Obama administration there is an attempt to engage more wisely with the issues that are of concern to Pakistan. The statement that was made while tabling the Kerry-Lugar Bill is significant in this respect."

"The Cost Of Delayed Action," an op-ed by Dr. Maleeha Lodhi in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/06)

"It may well have been a combination of internal and external factors that goaded an inert government into action. But the delay in making the decision to confront an increasingly dangerous situation speaks volumes about both the quality of leadership and its ability to accurately read the situation and act promptly. This has reinforced the characteristic that the government has displayed in the past year, of acting only when an issue or problem explodes in its face.... What is apparent from the developments of the past several weeks is that the response to the growing threat of militancy cannot just assume the shape of fire-fighting. A coherent and comprehensive strategy is needed to replace the patchwork and inconsistent approach followed thus far. This means going beyond the mantra of 'Deterrence, Dialogue and Development' that the PPP government marshals out as its counter-insurgency policy. This serves as a slogan rather than a serious plan of action."

"The Suicide Dream," an op-ed by Aqab Malik in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (05/06)

"According to the philosophy of the Taliban and their foreign cohorts, 'peace' deals are fundamentally used only to secure short-term objectives for long-term goals.... The promises within the deal are written and signed, but are not being pursued on account of the Taliban's delaying tactics. There appears to be little doubt that the Taliban's long-term strategy is to secure the whole of Pakistan, irrespective of what they say while making deals with the government. After all, if they are bereft of a conscience when it comes to killing innocent human beings, why would they care about the deals they make?"

"Talibanization & Musharraf," an op-ed by Shehryar Mazari in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (05/06)

"The Taliban crisis is a direct result of Musharraf's legacy. For self-preservation he deliberately weakened the secular political structure, replacing it with a political environment which proved extremely conducive for religio-political militant groups that now threaten the existence of Jinnah's Pakistan.... Obviously today's most burning issue is the Talibanization of large swathes of our country from where it appears to be spreading day by day, night by night. There is little point in berating the culprit." Feiertstein